

Exegetical Notes for December 2019

Advent 1 - Matthew 24:36-44

- No one knows the hour or the day. Throughout Christian history, specific predictions of the timing of the coming of the Lord have been made. Yet vs. 36 makes it clear that such predictions are misguided. Vs. 36 sets the stage and provides the reason for what follows in vss 37-44, namely, that God wants us to live a life of vigilance because no one knows the hour or day of Christ's return.
- Jesus himself sets the tone for our obedience to God, insisting that even the son of man does not know when this will take place. Jesus lives his life before the Father with a sense of constant vigilance as we see in the chapters which follow describing the events leading up to his death.
- The illustrations of the two men working in a field and two women grinding grain with a hand mill are meant to illustrate how suddenly things will change for those who are not ready for Christ's coming.
- The central take away of this text seems to be given in vs. 42. "Therefore, keep watch, because you do not know on what day the Lord will come." In a world in which our lives are often reduced to 'the routine,' to 'keep watch' is to live with hopeful expectancy. We are not merely waiting for Christ to return, we are waiting expectantly. There is a big difference. The Advent season is an important time to remind ourselves of what that hopeful expectancy looks like.

Advent 2 - Matthew 3:1-12

- All 4 gospels preface Jesus' birth and ministry with a description of the ministry of John the Baptist. He forms a bridge, a sort of link or hinge between the Old Testament prophets and the New Testament Messiah. In many respects John the Baptist could be considered the last of the Old Testament prophets.
- There are two elements to John's message:
 - o The first is repentance. The Greek work for repent is metanoeo. Some have said that it literally means 'to change one's mind' but

it goes beyond that. In this and other contexts, changing one's mind is just the beginning. It also involves a change of one's actions.

- The second aspect of John's message is the nearness of the kingdom of heaven. For many hundreds of years the Jewish people have been looking forward to God's direct intervention and the renewal of God's promises to Israel. John promises that such a renewal is at hand.
- John's ministry ultimately points directly to Jesus. "After me will come one who is more powerful than I, whose sandals I am not fit to carry. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire." A part of our hopeful waiting during Advent is to spread the word that the kingdom of heaven is near and that it is expressed in the birth, life, ministry and death of Jesus.

Advent 3 - Matthew 11:2-11

- A posture of hopeful waiting is not always easy. Notice that John the Baptist is in jail – I am sure this is not where he expected to be during the coming of the kingdom of God. Perhaps this is why he asks the question he does in vs. 3? Chapters 11-13 of Matthew return to the theme of disappointment. Jesus was not turning out to be the kind of Messiah the people were expecting.
- Jewish historian Josephus records the imprisonment of John the Baptist in the fortress of Machaerus, east of the Dead sea. John may have been imprisoned for up to a year.
- Matthew's use of the term "Christ" (Greek parallel to the Hebrew word "Messiah" or "anointed one") is very important. It occurs in the very 1st verse of Matthew's gospel, and is used again here (though doubtfully) from the mouth of John the Baptist.
- The Messianic activity of Jesus up to this point in his ministry is summed up in vs. 5. This seems to be a reference to Isa. 35:5-6 and 61:1.
- The main take away is in vs. 6. "Blessed is the one who does not fall away on account of me." Jesus reminds John not only of the miracles

which are taking place, but also of the need for faith even when things are happening that we don't understand.

Advent 4 - Romans 1:1-7

- Vs. 1 contains the phrase "the gospel of God." The word gospel means "good news" and, as N.T. Wright reminds us, it was used in the Roman world to describe a great military victory or the birth of a new ruler. We are reminded that in this case, the "good news of God" was promised throughout the Hebrew Old Testament.
- At the center of this Gospel is Jesus who is described as "God's Son." These two little words carry a lot of Old Testament content with them. King David, for example, was described as God's Son. In other places, the entire nation of Israel is also described as God's Son. By using this language to describe Jesus, Paul is reminding us of the special relationship Jesus enjoys with God the Father.
- We are reminded of the two ways in which we can know that Jesus is the Son of God. First, he is a human descendant of David, and more importantly, his resurrection from the dead was a powerful and undeniable declaration of that relationship.
- This means that not only does he enjoy a special relationship with God, but he is our Lord, and when we follow his call, we too enjoy that special relationship. We are "loved by God" vs. 7.

Christmas 1 - Matthew 2:13-23

- This emotionally difficult passage describes those believed by many to be the first martyrs of the church. Whether or not they are technically regarded as martyrs, they are the first to lose their lives as the result of the sharing of the good news of Jesus.
- The indescribable evil described here would not have been out of character for what historians tell us of Herod in this period near the end of his life.
- This text describes the sovereign power of God in preserving the life of the Messiah, even in the face of overwhelming evil. The flight to Egypt

would have made sense as Philo (ancient historian) notes that there were about 1 million Jews living in Egypt during this time period. It also brought to mind the words of the prophet Hosea (Hos. 11:1) “Out of Egypt I called my son”

- Often in Matthew the actions of Jesus are presented as a sort of “recapitulation” of the actions of Israel in the Old Testament (for example, 40 days of temptation in the wilderness for Jesus, 40 years for Israel. There are too many of these parallels to mention). This seems to be an early example of exactly that.

Note: I found D.A. Carson’s Commentary on Matthew to be a very valuable resource in preparing the notes on Advent 1, 2, and 3 and Christmas 1.